

IDENTITY FORMATION IN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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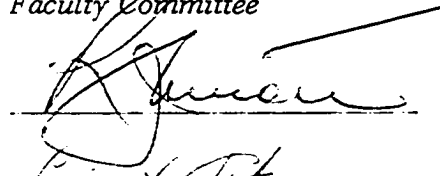
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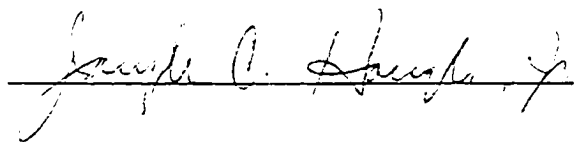


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Chapter 1

THE IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH

If a person is to function effectively in his environment, he must have a coherent identity, a sense of what he uniquely is and what he is not, a clear conception of his roles in society which is consistent both with his own expectations, drives, and talents, and with the opportunities that his environment provides.¹ This sense of a defined personality within an understood social reality, of a unique personality which is different from every other personality, enables the individual to determine what he wants to accomplish, to decide upon appropriate behavior patterns to adopt for reaching those goals, to evaluate his progress towards those goals, and to modify his behavior as necessary to achieve personal satisfaction.

This identity is formed gradually through the integration of material from many sources. Erik H. Erikson, who has done important studies into identity formation, lists these items as part of the material which needs to be brought into some form of unified pattern: constitutional gifts, individual needs, favored capacities, significant identifications with other persons in the

¹Erik H. Erikson, Identity and the Lifecycle
(New York: International Universities Press, 1959)

environment, effective defenses, and consistent roles.² To this list must surely be added personal experiences of success and failure, evaluative judgments from significant persons in the environment, perceptions of possible and impossible or improbable opportunities, valued behavior patterns in preferred religious or ideological frameworks, philosophic presuppositions, and so forth. Some of these items are beyond the control of the individual, but many of them can be deliberately controlled. It is possible to consciously enhance the formation of a sense of identity, by capitalizing on known strengths to find further areas of personal success, by seeking out evaluation from sympathetic persons in one's social environment, by study and experience of intellectual and artistic material, by commitment to value sources, and so forth.³

Such a sense of identity is vital to a healthy organization as well. Every organization needs to have a clear and consistent conception of its role, purpose, and function which is generally agreed upon by its constituent members, in order to set goals, to choose and direct activities, and to maximize progress towards those goals. The identity of an organization also results from the

²Erik H. Erikson, "The problem of ego identity", Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association, IV (1950) 56 - 121

³Erikson, Identity and the Lifecycle, p.90

gradual integration of material from many sources -- from inside the organization, from the environment, from the culture, and so forth. The identity of an organization can be consciously developed and affected by its members.

The identity of an organism -- whether an individual or an organization -- is dynamic rather than static. Senses of role, function, and purpose which have developed through the personal history of the organism are constantly modified as further material is integrated. The sense of identity is established by the organism's sense of continuity and identification with particular other persons and groups, as well as by a sense of differentiation from other persons and groups. Ordinarily, a continuously coherent identity, even though changing, enables the organism to function effectively within its environment. On occasion, however, the identity becomes diffused; the individual loses his sense of definition and stability, the organization loses common agreement on its role, purpose, and function. The organism loses its sense of continuity with and attachment to identifiable groups in the environment and within its history, and furthermore loses the ability to clearly distinguish itself from other groups. Such a time of confusion over identity can be very painful for an individual and very frustrating for an organization. To the extent that an individual's sense of identity is tied to an identifiable organization -- place of employment, social organization,

church, etc. -- a state of identity diffusion in the organization produces identity diffusion in the person's own psyche. Such a time when identity integration has given way to identity diffusion can be described as a crisis, "a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another, marshaling resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation."⁴

A crisis of identity now faces the United Methodist Church, along with other major denominations; the crisis is particularly severe in many local congregations, which are faced with confusion, doubt, and disagreement among members as to the nature and purpose of the church, and its proper role in contemporary society. Many United Methodists have lost the sense of continuity with any of the various traditions and beliefs which have been a part of the church in the past; for many, there is no longer any unique sense of what it means to be a United Methodist. Doctrines of the church which in past years were widely accepted, seem impractical in the face of the anxiety and anomie which characterize contemporary society; furthermore, these doctrines have led to styles of activity which many United Methodists find inconsistent with the Gospel; and finally many

⁴Erik H. Erikson, Identity: Youth and Crisis (New York: Norton, 1968), p.16

church members, even those who claim to support traditional doctrines, do not seem in practice to base their actual relationship to the church upon those doctrines.

Identity diffusion is not unique to United Methodism. Dean M. Kelley, analyzing the recent decline in membership of many major Protestant denominations as over against the rapid rise in membership of smaller groups, suggests that one primary problem faced by denominations such as the United Methodist Church, the Lutheran Church in America, the Episcopal Church, the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, and the United Church of Christ is a lack of general commitment to "a particular explanation or formulation of meaning and to the stream of collective experience or religious organization that bears it."⁵ Kelley points instead to a characteristic "allegiance that is partial, ambivalent, or distributed among various competing objects -- which is not commitment but its opposite: lukewarmness."⁶ Such a phenomenon is in fact a crisis in identity.

This crisis in identity is not just a recent phenomenon -- it has been recognized and described for many years now. H. Richard Niebuhr has traced the emerging

⁵Dean M. Kelley, Why Conservative Churches Are Growing (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 158

⁶Ibid.

recognition of the crisis back through the 1930s.⁷

Norman Pittenger, G. J. Jud, and others have documented the serious impact of this identity confusion in recent years.⁸

As time has passed and the crisis has intensified, it has become more and more vital that denominations such as the United Methodist Church develop again integrated and generally accepted understandings of their purpose and function if they are to serve as functional and effective instruments of the Gospel in the world today.

One aspect of this crisis is the lack of felt continuity between United Methodism and the historical groups which preceded it. As Albert C. Outler, eminent United Methodist theologian, has put it: " . . . we have passed beyond the gravitational field of our historical origin and are now in what might be called a condition of weightlessness as far as our peculiar history is concerned -- a detraditioned state of mind and polity."⁹

Many factors have contributed to this detraditioning. The present structure of The United Methodist Church has

⁷H. Richard Niebuhr, The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), p. 56ff.

⁸Norman Pittenger, The Christian Church as Social Process (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), chapter 6; G. J. Jud, E. W. Mills, Jr., and G. W. Burch, Ex-Pastors (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1970), chapter 2.

⁹Albert C. Outler, "Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church", in Dow Kirkpatrick (ed.), The Doctrine of the Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), p.24.

resulted from a series of mergers between groups which had unique senses of their own identities which conflicted at points. In order to accomplish these mergers, each group had to make necessary adjustments and sacrifices with regard to strongly held doctrines, politics, etc. This process, while it was necessary and in many ways beneficial, did lead to a certain loss of the sense of historical continuity and identity which has not yet been entirely overcome. Many members of local congregations who were steeped in the traditions and beliefs of particular groups prior to mergers, and who either by choice or by force of events were not privy to the deliberations and negotiations of the commissions which worked out the details of the various mergers, now find themselves part of a denomination which holds positions and acts in ways which are contrary to the positions and styles to which they were accustomed. It is no wonder that a certain uneasiness, a diffusion of identity should develop.

The recent merger between The Methodist Church and The Evangelical United Brethren Church is the most recent of the mergers which have affected those who are now United Methodists. However, other mergers within the memories of many who are now United Methodists have contributed to the detraditioning of the sense of identity. The merger in 1939 between The Methodist

Episcopal Church, The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and The Methodist Protestant Church involved the adjustment of many doctrinal and politic issues.¹⁰ The mergers between The Evangelical Association and The United Evangelical Church in 1922 to form The Evangelical Church, and between The Evangelical Church and The United Brethren Church in 1946 to form The Evangelical United Brethren Church, affected the lives of many contemporary United Methodists, and have contributed to a sense of ambivalence about historical identification and continuity.

This is not in any sense to denigrate these mergers, or to assert that the necessary sacrifices and adjustments in doctrine and polity ought not to have been made. It is necessary to point out, however, that such maneuvers, whatever their notable advantages and benefits, can contribute to problems which must later be faced and resolved. One such problem is the current diffusion of identity in The United Methodist Church.

Another factor in the diffusion of identity of The United Methodist Church also has historical roots. Jaroslav J. Pelikan has pointed out the strong tie historically between American Methodism and the American

¹⁰Frederick E. Maser, "The Story of Unification, 1874 - 1939", in Emory S. Bucke (ed.), The History of American Methodism (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), III, chapter 32.

social ethos.¹¹ More than any other denomination, Methodism has understood itself in terms of characteristic American social phenomena. As the United States has undergone radical social change in the past few generations, so Methodist understandings of their own purpose and functions, tied to sociological phenomena which no longer characterize the actual situation of the church, have been thrown into disarray.

Pelikan points to the closing of the American frontier as one major factor.

. . . it is important to note that the frontier was a sociological as well as a geographical phenomenon. Thus, when the geographical frontier had moved west and when it finally disappeared, the techniques of frontier religion did not automatically lose their relevance. . . . American Methodists concerned themselves for the silent in the land. The American proletariat and the American Negro, both before and after emancipation, were still on the frontier long after urbanization and industrialization had begun to reshape American society. If anything, it was the loss of the frontier spirit rather than its retention that gradually alienated Methodism from elements of American society that had been its traditional concern.¹²

This is a factor that Outler also mentions.¹³ American Methodism, which throughout the 18th and 19th centuries understood itself as a group with a special mission in

¹¹Jaroslav J. Pelikan, "Methodism's Contribution to America", in Buck, III, chapter 34.

¹²Ibid., III, p.603 ¹³Outler, p.12

extraordinary circumstances, out on the explorative frontiers of society, and thus distinct from an established social order, has become to a large extent composed of people who identify themselves with the established social order, and understand themselves as distinct from radical frontier groups with special missions. Thus the expressed corporate self-understanding of United Methodism today, with its doctrines and structures grounded in historical Methodist positions, conflicts with the personal self-understandings of many (if not most) of its members.

Another aspect to this, as Pelikan points out, is that American Methodism has traditionally been profoundly ambivalent about education and intellectual sophistication, also a heritage from the frontier mentality.¹⁴ A form of anti-intellectualism remains a strong force in many local congregations today. And yet, United Methodism corporately puts great stress on theological sophistication and education. This is perhaps a positive development, but it does tend to cut the sense of historical continuity, and to contribute to the diffusion of identity in the church. To put the matter into other words, United Methodists have lost their sense of identification with the unique self-understandings which have defined the denomination in the past. This rootlessness has made it difficult for many

¹⁴Pelikan, III, p.603 - 605

United Methodists to differentiate their unique identity from that of other denominations. An identity must be constituted from both positive ("What we are") and negative ("What we are not") elements.

Georgia Harkness has pointed to yet another significant aspect of this identity crisis for United Methodists: " . . . laymen think of themselves primarily as assistants to the clergy, who if not the true church are at least the major element in it."¹⁵ Compare this observation with the following statement from the Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church:

Ministry in the Christian church is derived from the ministry of the Father, through the Incarnate Son by the Holy Spirit. It is a ministry bestowed upon and required of the entire Church. All Christians are called to ministry, and theirs is a ministry of the people of God within the community of faith and in the world. Members of The United Methodist Church receive this gift of ministry in company with all Christians. . . . There are persons within the ministry of the baptized who are called of God and set apart by the Church for the specialized ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Order.¹⁶

In theory the ordained clergy is only a functional subset of the ministry. But in common usage, ministry refers only to the persons and functions of the ordained clergy. It is no mere anomaly that The American College Dictionary, in

¹⁵Georgia Harkness, The Church and Its Laity (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p.16

¹⁶The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 1972 (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1973), p.141

defining ministry, gives the ordained clergy first place, and lists the "act of service", which would involve the laity as well, as the eighth definition, after several highly restricted and relatively unimportant definitions.¹⁷

Ministry has been, and still is, a central concept in defining the functions of the church, and therefore its identity. This has been particularly true in American Methodism, with its historical self-understanding as a group with a special mission (ministry) in extraordinary circumstances. It is not surprising that confusion over the meaning of ministry is indicative of confusion over the identity of the church. The confusion is not simply semantic -- United Methodists are not doing ministry in fact even though they use the word only to refer to the activities of the ordained clergy. Many lay persons have lost the sense of ministry in their own lives. As ministry has been more and more connected with the activities of the clergy, the sense of meaningful function in the church for lay people has become less and less strong -- these laity (aided and abetted by many clergy) have defined themselves out of significant participation in the church. This phenomenon may partially explain why many United Methodists now look outside the church for significant religious

¹⁷The American College Dictionary (New York: Random House, 1960), p.774.

experience -- if by definition meaningful lay participation is impossible in the church, then meaningful participation in Christian life must take place outside the church.

There is some evidence that many United Methodist laymen are becoming aware of the dangers of this clericalization, and are open to the development of new forms that emphasize lay participation. Virgil Sexton, summarizing a survey of thousands of United Methodists representative of the church, has written: "United Methodist laity are tired of being 'in but not of' the church. They demand more involvement in basic decision-making . . . Groups within the church who feel uninvolved demand participation in working out their own destinies."¹⁸ The need for the development of a new sense of identity is emerging in the recognition of church members.

It is ironic that, as ordained clergy have become more and more central in the life of the Church, the developing forces of history and culture have led to a surge of secular organizations taking over functions which once were almost the exclusive property of clergymen -- the state has taken over education; civil functionaries perform weddings and other ceremonial tasks; a host of private and governmental agencies provide social services

¹⁸Virgil Wesley Sexton, Listening to the Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), p.86

and relief to the needy; and psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, and community mental health agencies provide counsel and supportive services for those experiencing emotional distress and family upheaval. Persons who once might have looked to the church for fellowship, recreation, and amusement now watch television, go camping with the family, attend Kiwanis, or participate in a host of similar secular activities.

It is therefore not at all surprising to find clergy as well as laity affected by the crisis of identity in the church. Ordained clergy in The United Methodist Church often seem to have no clear image of their own role which can integrate the various functions they perform and provide them with any sense of unique importance to the Church. The laity, at the same time that they have delegated responsibility for the functional operation of the church to the clergy, have lost any coherent sense of the specific role of the ordained clergy. As the role of the ordained clergy has become increasingly indeterminate and obscure, both clergy and laity have found themselves increasingly unhappy with the performance of clergy in church organizations -- in the absence of specific norms, humans often tend to judge negatively.

It is perhaps especially true of those who serve in the ordained ministry . . . For them, the so-called 'crisis of identity' can be particularly urgent, since the traditional notions of ministry have given them the idea that they are possessed of a status which

guarantees both place and meaning while in our own time that status is generally disregarded or unrecognized by the general public -- and to the minister himself it seems to be more a problem than a solution of a problem. I believe that this helps to explain the fact that so many young men, having felt a call to the ministry and after due training having been ordained, discover themselves to be unhappy and uncertain in their new calling.¹⁹

This is indeed a crisis -- if The United Methodist Church is to weather it, some new concept of the identity of the church and the appropriate roles of both clergy and laity as ministers in it must be developed and generally agreed upon. F. Thomas Trotter has said, "It is characteristic of United Methodists that we have developed the style of doing ministry instead of defining it."²⁰ Such an approach has much to commend it. But it must be realized that this approach relies on assumptions about the nature of the church and its ministry which are generally agreed upon. When -- as now seems to be the case -- these informal understandings are no longer widely accepted, it becomes necessary for the church to be not only doing but also defining. From the activities of the church in recent years, certain concepts of the church and its constituent functions seem to be emerging which are gradually gaining wide acceptance. These concepts are as

¹⁹Pittenger, p.88

²⁰"Ministry Sunday 1973", distributed by The United Methodist Church.

yet only vaguely discernible -- much work still needs to be done in defining them.²¹

The process of developing an identity can be deliberately affected and enhanced. This task now confronts The United Methodist Church, which suffers from a diffusion of identity characterized by, among other factors, a loss of the sense of continuity with historical tradition, confusion over the appropriate roles of clergy and laity, and lack of common agreement on basic doctrines of the function and definition of the Church, and thus a loss of a sense of unique identity which both defines The United Methodist Church, and differentiates it from other groups.

No one person or work can entirely define or develop an identity for a complex organization such as The United Methodist Church. The process of identity formation must be affected by representative inputs from the whole spectrum of United Methodists and United Methodist groups, so that common agreement may eventually be attained on basic issues. Furthermore, the sheer mass of problems, sources, and viewpoints to be dealt with makes a comprehensive presentation not feasible. This dissertation therefore makes no claim to completeness; however, it does attempt to make some new and useful contributions to the analysis of the problem, and to

²¹Niebuhr, chapter 2.

present material which may be useful in the final resolution of the identity crisis.

Chapter 2

ON SOURCES

A sense of identity is integrated from diverse materials. Such a sense of identity also enables an organism to integrate the events of which it is a part, to "define, clarify, and comprehend the questions about the meaning of human life as they are apprehended by contemporary men."¹ Identity is both integrated and integrating.

If the development of a sense of identity is to be deliberately affected and enhanced, the questions of appropriate sources become very important. Is all available material to be given equal weight, or are some materials to be preferred? What criteria are to be used for evaluating material which is claimed to be pertinent? Which issues are basic and which peripheral? Such questions need to be considered before particular materials which may be pertinent to identity formation are presented and evaluated.

The question of sources is basically a question of

¹Gordon D. Kaufman, Systematic Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), p.viii.

presuppositions. Any work such as this dissertation which is written by one author inevitably reflects the personal presuppositions of that author, presuppositions which ought to be made explicit where possible. If the work is to be useful to the denomination as a whole, however, it must be consonant with the presuppositions which have been widely accepted by the denomination in the past and continue to characterize in some way the basic stance of United Methodists.

The preceding statement depends in its own right on a basic presupposition -- that any new sense of identity needs to be clearly continuous with the historical traditions which precede it. Such a basic presupposition is not finally susceptible to proof -- at best, the search for such proof is a regressus infinitus. However, some pragmatic observations may be in order.

First, it is assumed that a United Methodist self-understanding will need to be consciously Christian. The United Methodist Church will always understand itself in some connection to the historical events involving Jesus Christ and his followers. These events have been mediated through a historical process of which The United Methodist Church is a latter part. Any Christian self-understanding draws upon "linguistic and conceptual schemas created and refined during the two thousand years of Christian

thought."² A sense of identity for The United Methodist Church will necessarily involve the delineation of one particular strand of this historical process as over against other strands, and an identification with the language and conceptual schema characteristically associated with that strand.

Second, the process of identity integration does not begin with a tabula rasa. Most United Methodists grew up in one of the historical traditions which led directly to The United Methodist Church; their ideas, conceptions, and religious experiences have been intimately formed and affected by these traditions. If not consciously, then certainly subconsciously their expectations and preferences have been formed by the unique characteristics of these traditions. This is true corporately as well as individually -- the structures, doctrinal statements, and functions of the church and of many subordinate groups within it have been developed historically.

This historical conditioning will inevitably be a strong factor in the development of a new sense of integrated identity. It can be dealt with deliberately, with conscious attention given to affirmations of historical emphases and styles, and to reasoned changes from historical positions (a clearly understood modification

²Ibid.

of a historical position, with attention given to reasons for the change, can still be psychologically continuous). Or, on the other hand, this historical conditioning can be ignored, in which case felt differences between accustomed positions and new positions manifest themselves in the loss of a sense of continuity and in a vague sense that what is now happening is not what ought to be happening (i.e. what one has come to accept as valid through the effect of historical processes).

Finally, the Christian faith works in human lives to integrate and give meaning to the various events which compose those lives. This process is now basically no different than it ever was. The psychological dramas which characterize human experience are timeless, although some of the detail is unique to the current era. During nearly two thousand years of competent and sensitive thought, Christians have found that meaning and order in the chaotic events of life can take shape around the Christ-event. The historical traditions bear faithful witness to the effect the Gospel can have on men's lives. The useful linguistic and conceptual schema schemata which have been hammered out on the anvil of human experience over these many years are tools which ought not be lightly discarded. The utility of the unique emphases of the various strands which have come into United Methodism, in a wide variety of human settings, is a signal that they may well be valuable

today.

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church contains a statement of the characteristic doctrines and emphases of The United Methodist Church which may well serve to delineate the outer boundaries of the discussion which is carried on here.³ The conclusion to this statement is a good summary:

Serious concern for our 'doctrine and doctrinal standards' should inform, evaluate, and strengthen all the forms of ministry by which we fulfill our calling. Occasionally, they have been considered impediments rather than motivations to new and creative ministries. Doctrine and doctrinal standards are never an end in themselves, nor even a resting place along the way. They must be a springboard from which we are propelled into creative living and our tasks as agents of reconciliation in the name of the loving God. Our shared tradition with all other Christians, as well as the distinctive United Methodist emphases, is the context in which we work. Our sources and guidelines of theology -- Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason -- mark out the broad boundaries of our endeavor. As United Methodists see more clearly who we have been, as we understand more concretely what are the needs of the world, as we learn more effectively how to use our heritage and guidelines, we will become more and more able to fulfill our calling as a pilgrim people and discern who we may become. It is in this spirit that we seek to engage in the theological task with a confidence born of obedience, and we invite all our people to a continuing enterprise: to understand our faith in God's love, known in Jesus Christ, more and more profoundly, and to give this love more and more effective witness in word, work, mission, and life.⁴

The United Methodist Church understands itself in

³The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 1972 (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1973), p.82

⁴Ibid.

relation to the historical events of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, culminating in the events of the life of Jesus Christ. The scriptures hold a unique and central place in the mediation of those events, and of their underlying meanings. The Bible is the primary witness to the historical Christ-event, to its antecedents and its immediate impact upon human lives. The Book of Discipline states:

United Methodists share with all other Christians the conviction that Scripture is the primary source and guideline for doctrine. . . . It is the primitive source of the memories, images, and hopes by which the Christian community came into existence and that still confirm and nourish its faith and understanding.⁵

The Bible is more than just a constitutional document for the Church, however. The Bible is a primary foundation for a unique point of view, but it must be studied and interpreted conscientiously and responsibly to develop a sense of identity with this point of view. "There is need for a much more conscientious confrontation with the Word within the words, of the spirit behind the letter, of the intentions in forming the texts."⁶ Through such enlightened study of the Scriptures, the formation of an identity for The United Methodist Church can be enhanced and directed. Given the presupposition that an acceptable

⁵Ibid., p.76

⁶Thor Hall, A Theology of Christian Devotion (Nashville: Upper Room, 1969), p.4

identity ought to be normatively "Christian", there must be some normative process which can correct tendencies which would lead to understandings which are not compatible with the structures of meaning in God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Enlightened study of the Scriptures is this normative process. "From this careful handling of the Scripture, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, believers may appropriately apply the truth to the circumstances of their own time and place."⁷

Even the creative use of the understandings which have traditionally characterized the historical movements which have led to United Methodism must undergo critical evaluation on the basis of responsible study of the Scriptures. The Bible, as the primary source and medium for the structures of meaning in human existence which are implicit in God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, represents the criterion by which all Christian self-understandings, both individual and corporate, are to be judged. The basic task is still to reclaim the Church and its members for a fundamental commitment to the Biblical point of view.

Other sources may also prove useful in the development of doctrine, provided they are consistent with

⁷Book of Discipline, p.76

the Scriptures.

Since all truth is from God, efforts to discern the connections between revelation and reason, faith and science, grace and nature are useful endeavors in developing credible and communicable doctrine.⁸

This dissertation is an attempt to take material from one rather narrow segment of such a source, specifically General System Theory as it has been applied to organizational theory; and to show that this material is consistent with, and extends and clarifies, the emerging new conception of the church. In line with the need, expressed above, to critically evaluate such material from a Scriptural perspective, studies of the Biblical doctrine of the church are also included, and affinities between the two sources are pointed out.

The author has drawn extensively on the work of a number of profound scholars. However, the integration and extension of these sources -- the intellectual system which informs this dissertation -- is an intensely personal matter. The discussion is not intended to be a propositional analysis of ultimate truth, but rather to be a connected series of informed insights -- certainly not the only possible image of the church, or even a complete image, but still a presentation of material that is consonant with the Scriptures, and that has certain practical advantages.

⁸Ibid., p.78

The author has also drawn on his personal experiences in management systems analysis in the aerospace industry and in government agencies. Some of the judgments herein are therefore pragmatic assessments which have not yet been fully justified by theory.⁹

One final statement needs to be made before the body of this dissertation is presented. Every image of an organization presupposes a doctrine of man, which ought to be made explicit. The author's presuppositions include the following. Man is basically good. He is motivated toward positive personal and social ends. Man is not only positively motivated, he is capable of structuring his own affairs to achieve positive goals. However, experience often does move him to be evil, lazy, hurtful, irresponsible, self-centered, and so forth. Human affairs can be so structured as to minimize this negative behavior, but negative behavior will always be a human factor to be reckoned with.

Man is social; he is constantly joining with other men. To put the matter differently, man needs men. It is in assuming responsibility for other men, and in giving other men responsibility for one's self, that true humaneness is achieved. Man needs to be confirmed in his humaneness by other men. Man is also in process; he is constantly

⁹Ibid., p.77 - 78

in flux, groping, questing, testing, experimenting, and growing. There is a tremendous untapped potential in man yearning for discovery and release. The individual is never fixed; he is developing and seeking new avenues for self-determination and self-expression.

Chapter 3

THE IDEA OF THE CHURCH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A brief scan of the New Testament in English shows the word "church" to be fairly common. It is the dominant and central term used for the followers of Christ in a corporate sense. Furthermore, "church" has a definite theological connotation. It comes from the Greek *κυριακόν*, which means "that which belongs to the Lord."¹ However, in the Greek New Testament there is no single term which is so dominant and central. There are instead a variety of terms, each connoting different emphases and understandings in varying contexts. Many of these terms have unique secular uses as well - they do not automatically imply a theological reference. Any contemporary doctrine of the reality called "church" in English which is to be in harmony with New Testament ideas must take account of these vagaries of meaning and connotation.

The New Testament was written at various times during the early development and spread of the community of followers of Christ. Much of this early writing shows the obvious influence of Old Testament ideas and images.

¹P. S. Minear, "Church, Idea of", in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), I, p.607

Other parts are conditioned by the unique situations early followers of Christ found themselves in, and by the unique pressures they experienced. Furthermore, much of this material can be described as tentative, developmental intellectual grappling with the concept of the followers of Christ as a unique corporate body. In any case, this community is always regarded in the New Testament as a unique corporate group which came into existence at a definite point of history through an act of God -- the Incarnation.² All images of the church, whether reflecting Old Testament themes or using secular ideas to meet new religious situations, must be understood from the perspective of this initiating act of grace. Thus the English use of the single word "church" to denote a reality with inevitable theological overtones is not without merit, even when it sometimes obscures the original richness of the variety of New Testament images and ideas referring to the same reality.

The Greek word most commonly translated as "church" is ἐκκλησία, which appears 112 times in the New Testament. 90% of these appearances are found in Paul's letters, the book of Acts, and Revelation; the word is not used in Mark, Luke, John, II Timothy, Titus, I-II Peter, I-II John, or

²C. H. Dodd, "The Biblical Doctrine of the People of God", in Dow Kirkpatrick (ed.), The Doctrine of the Church (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), p.29.

Jude.³ In secular usage, ἐκκλησία was used to describe an assembly, such as a regularly summoned political body.⁴

From the time of Thucydides, Plato, and Xenophon onwards, and then specially in inscriptions, ἐκκλησία is the gathering of the δῆμος in Athens and most Greek cities. The derivation is simple and significant: the assembled citizens are the ἐκκληῖται (called out), i.e. those who have been summoned by the herald.⁵

In addition to these secular connotations, the use of ἐκκλησία in the Septuagint must have influenced early Christian writers. The LXX used ἐκκλησία to translate the Hebrew קָהָל (qāhāl), almost a hundred times. The basic meaning of קָהָל is a meeting or gathering. Any group may be gathered for any purpose. It is the people and the purpose which provide specific significance to the קָהָל. It may be the mustering of men of military age for war (Gen. 49.6; Num. 22.4; Ezek. 16.40) or for civic action. The persons involved may be prophets (I Sam. 19.20) or officials (Num. 16.3; I Chr. 28.8) or a disorderly mob (Ecclus. 26.6). They may be evildoers (Ps. 26.5) as readily as those who worship God (II Chr. 30.13; Ecclus. 50.13, 20). Probably the most significant קָהָל in the Old Testament is the assembly

³ Minear, I, p.607.

⁴ Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p.240

⁵ Karl Ludwig Schmidt, "The Church", in Gerhard Kittel (ed.), Bible Key Words (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), I, p.24.

of Israel before God at Horeb (Deut. 4.10; 9.10; 10.4; 18.16), when God made His covenant with them.⁶ The term is especially used of those 'within the covenant' as opposed to 'the stranger in your midst' (Deut. 23.3; Neh. 13.1).

In the LXX, $\epsilon\lambda\eta\gamma$ was also translated by other Greek words. Most important was $\sigmaυναγωγή$, a general term which meant a meeting, a gathering, a crowd.⁸ $\Sigmaυναγωγή$ was also used to translate the Hebrew עֵדָה (ēdhāh). עֵדָה differs from $\epsilon\lambda\eta\gamma$ in that it can be applied to a congregation apart from its act of meeting together. ἐκκλησία is never used in the LXX to translate עֵדָה . And $\sigmaυναγωγή$ is mostly used in the New Testament to refer to Jewish congregations. Only rarely is $\sigmaυναγωγή$ used to refer to a Christian assembly (Jas. 2.2).⁹ Thus the major Old Testament antecedent for the Christian community is the $\epsilon\lambda\eta\gamma$.

In the Old Testament, the $\epsilon\lambda\eta\gamma$ qualified by 'of Yahweh' or 'of Israel' acquires a technical meaning of the people of God. Its use on certain solemn occasions, as in Deuteronomy at the giving of the Law, in I Kings 8.14 at the dedication of the Temple, and at the republishing of the Law

⁶Minear, I, p.608.

⁷"Church", in F. L. Cross (ed.), The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p.283.

⁸Bauer, p.790. ⁹Minear, I, p.608

by Ezra, emphasizes that the people of Israel are constituted by the word of Yahweh as the bearers of the divine covenant and promise.¹⁰ Thus by New Testament times, ἐκκλησία had generally associated with it notions of a group purposefully gathered by God for a particular purpose, a special responsibility. Such a group is characterized not only by its composition, but also by its mission. This connotation becomes quite important in the New Testament when ἐκκλησία is used.

Ἐκκλησία is not used at all in three of the Gospels. In Matthew, it occurs three times -- once in 16.18 and twice in 18.17. The reference in Matthew 16.18 is considered to be a statement of the early Christian community rather than an authentic statement of Jesus.¹¹ In any case, the relationship of Peter to the church may be instructive. "The designation of Peter as 'the rock' does not view him as the first bishop of Rome and the founder of the Roman hierarchy, but as the first witness of the Resurrection and therefore as the prime apostolic witness that God raised Jesus from the dead (I Cor. 15.5)."¹²

¹⁰R. H. Fuller, "Church, Assembly", in Alan Richardson (ed.), A Theological Word Book of the Bible (New York: Macmillan, 1950), p.46.

¹¹Howard Clark Kee, "Matthew", The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1971), p.630

¹²Ibid.

Here the church is specifically related to a purpose and a function, namely to witness to the truth of the resurrection and all that it implies about God's power and activity in the world.

The reference in Matthew 18.17 is to legal proceedings within the Christian community, and implies that the community is to act as a whole on certain matters affecting individual members. Such a procedure seems to imply a previously developed set of administrative procedures, indicating that this may be a later church rule put into the mouth of Jesus.¹³ Whether this is an authentic saying of Jesus or not, it is noteworthy that the ἐκκλησία is presented as a corporate body with certain functions which need to be undertaken as a whole. It is also noteworthy that a sense of functional hierarchy is implied -- in Matthew 18.15, two individuals are first to try to resolve their own dispute; if that fails, several members of the community function as witnesses and (apparently) arbitrators; finally, the whole corporate body joins in.

In The Acts of the Apostles, ἐκκλησία is first used of the community which had been formed in Jerusalem in response to the preaching of the apostles (Acts 5.11; 8.13).

¹³Ibid., p.632.

Membership in the community was open to those who accepted the belief that Jesus was the Messiah and had been baptized (Acts 2.37 - 41). Although the community in this part of Acts remains within Judaism, yet its adherents understand themselves as unique within Judaism. In the discussion later about expressions other than ἐκκλησία which are used for the church in the New Testament, it will be shown that the Messianic tradition in Judaism plays a strong role in the developing Christian identity. In Acts, the Christian community obviously understands itself as the true, eschatological community, which as such has already received the Spirit of the Messiah.¹⁴ The Christian community is then understood as continuous with the true people of God coming out of Old Testament tradition, who were called ἐκκλησία in the LXX (Acts 7.38). Those Jews who did not acknowledge Christ as the Messiah were understood by the Christians to have put themselves outside the covenant community, the ἐκκλησία.

In Acts, also, is seen the occurrence of the characteristic phrase ἐκκλησία τοῦ Θεοῦ (Acts 20.28), "the church of God." This phrase has its roots in Old Testament usage (the qahal of Yahweh or of Israel, discussed previously in this chapter), giving the church a linguistic continuity

¹⁴ Fuller, p.47.

with the Old Testament. It ought here to be pointed out that ἐκκλησιᾶ is used in Acts with secular connotations as well (Acts 19.32; 39.40), so that the phrase has a functional meaning -- it is not just a title for a group of people, but refers also to their purposeful assembly.

As new communities of Christians develop outside Jerusalem, ἐκκλησιᾶ is used in two distinguishable, but closely related senses. The first sense is that of a community of believers gathered from the inhabitants of a specific area, a local Christian community (Acts 11.26; 13.1; 14.27; 15.3; 18.22; 20.17). In this sense, it can be used as a plural, referring to a number of such local congregations (Acts 15.41; 16.5). But ἐκκλησιᾶ is also used in a wider sense of the church universal, to which all Christians belong (Acts 9.31; 20.28).¹⁵ These two senses of ἐκκλησιᾶ cannot be fully separated, however. It is not that the ἐκκλησιᾶ is divided into ἐκκλησιαι. Rather, the local congregations are localisations of the universal redeemed community (expressed perhaps more clearly in German as "Heilsgemeinde in lokaler Begrenzung").¹⁶ The very fact that the writer of Acts used one word for both senses is ample warrant for not separating the senses too strictly.

¹⁵Bauer, p.240. ¹⁶Schmidt, I, p.2.

In the Pauline epistles, ἐκκλησία is used in very similar fashion to Acts. It describes individual churches (Rom. 16.1; I Cor. 1.2; II Cor. 1.1; I Thess. 1.1, II Thess. 1.1; Col. 4.16); a slight extension of this usage refers to individual households (Rom. 16.5; Col. 4.15; Philem. 2). such city organizations are also addressed as groups by province (I Cor. 16.19; II Cor. 8.1; Gal. 1.2,22; I Thess. 2.14) or by racial and cultural origin (Rom. 16.4). In each case, ἐκκλησία identifies without qualifying adjectives a particular Christian community or group of communities. The idea of "having been gathered" is common in all these contexts.¹⁷

As was true in the Old Testament usage, the ἐκκλησία is characterized by its composition and purpose. The nature of this community is continually determined by the one who calls or gathers it, the purpose for which he does so, and the means by which he does so. In the Pauline epistles, the phrases ἐκκλησία τοῦ Θεοῦ and ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ are frequently used, making it clear that the ἐκκλησία belongs to God because of his action in Jesus Christ, calling the ἐκκλησία into being, dwelling within it, ruling over it, and realizing his purpose through it.¹⁸ In I Thess. 1.1 the double phrase ἐκκλησία ἐν Θεῷ πατρὶ καὶ

¹⁷Minear, I, p.608. ¹⁸Ibid.

κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ makes it perfectly clear that the church exists because of the power of God in Christ. Because the local congregations all participate in this relationship to Christ, and to God, they constitute a single reality -- a world-wide covenant community which is embodied in localized form wherever a congregation exists.

In I Corinthians one purpose for the church is given special attention. In I Corinthians 11.18; 14.19, 23, 28, 34, 35 the ἐκκλησία comes together specifically for worship -- for the Lord's supper, for instruction, for spiritual experiences, and so forth. This worship is consistently understood to be a response to the action of God -- especially as validated by specific experiences of the risen Christ -- rather than an enthusiastic celebration grounded solely in human volition.¹⁹

In the Pauline epistles, as in Acts, the Christian ἐκκλησία is the continuation of the relationship between God and man described in the Old Testament, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in the New Covenant.²⁰ In Galatians 3.29 and 6.16, Paul implies that the Christian ἐκκλησία is the true Israel, the heirs of the promises. As such it receives and disburses God's glory, participates in God's struggle with Satan, and has the specific promise of eternal life (Eph. 2).

¹⁹Schmidt, I, p.13. ²⁰Ibid., I, p.12.

In the remainder of the New Testament, there is nothing different of any importance than what has been said above about the ἐκκλησία.

In addition to descriptions and comments about the ἐκκλησία, there is considerable other material which pertains to the church. One body of expressions consists of Old Testament ideas and images applied to Israel, transferred to the ἐκκλησία. Such expressions include "Israel of God" (Gal. 6.16), "Abraham's offspring" (Gal. 3.29), "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion" (Jas. 1.1), "a spiritual house" (I Pet. 2.5), "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession" (I Pet. 2.9,10). The Church is equated to the Temple (I Cor. 3.16,17; II Cor. 6.16; Eph. 2.21); to the olive (Rom. 11.17b-24); and the relationship between the Messiah and his people is equated to the vine and the branches (John 15.1-8). All these expressions emphasize the continuity of the Christian ἐκκλησία with the old Israel, and the eschatological renewal of the old Israel in the ἐκκλησία.²¹

There are a great many other ways of expressing the idea of the church in the New Testament -- over 100, in fact -- of varying degrees of importance. In order to simplify their analysis, it is possible to summarize them

²¹Fuller, p.47.

(somewhat arbitrarily) under certain categories; the ten categories developed by P. S. Minear are as useful as any.²²

The church is characterized by its calling, the call of God through Jesus Christ to men. The church can then be considered to be those whom God has called, chosen, gathered, foreknown, justified, glorified, sanctified. Such men, upon whom God has acted, are called "saints" or "holy ones" (οἱ ἅγιοι), meaning Christians consecrated to God.²³ At numerous places in the New Testament, the church is equated to the saints (John 17.17-19; Acts 9.31-32; Rom. 15.16-31; I Cor. 14.33; II Cor. 1.1; Eph. 2.19, 5.26; Heb. 13.12; I Pet. 2.5-9; Rev. 20.9). Such an equation emphasizes the dependence of the church on the activity of God. Several analogous expressions are used in the New Testament to denote the church, for example "the chosen" (οἱ ἐκλεκτοί), which also emphasizes God's initiative.²⁴

The church is also characterized by its response to the call. Thus phrases such as "disciple, adherent" (μαθηταί)²⁵, and "those who follow, those who obey" (οἱ ἀκολουθῶντες)²⁶ are equated to the church. Thus the church is the community of believers, those committed to the gospel and to the work of divine reconciliation (John 3.17; Acts 4.10; Rom. 4; Gal. 3; Eph. 1; Heb. 4; I John 5).

²²Minear, I, p.609-617. ²³Bauer, p.10.

²⁴Ibid., p.242. ²⁵Ibid., p.486. ²⁶Ibid., p.30

Another aspect of answering the call is accepting the demands and responsibilities which the call entails. Thus such images as "slaves" (δοῦλοι)²⁷ and "servants" (διδάκονοι)²⁸ are applied to all those in the church (Matt. 6.24, 10.24, 20.27; Mark 10.44; Luke 17.10; John 13.16; Rom. 6.18, 22; II Cor. 4.5; Gal. 5.13; I Thess. 1.9). The church is characterized by its acceptance of responsibility and its consideration of God's demands as binding orders.

Throughout the New Testament, the church is referred to as "the people of God". As was pointed out earlier, the primary referents for this phrase are the Old Testament concepts and images of Israel, God's people. But the church is never understood simply as the receptor of eternal verities from the past;

What constitutes men as the Israel of God is that qualitative communal relationship to God which is produced by God's promise and corporate hope, by God's election and man's faith, by Christ's dying life, and man's acceptance of that life as his own²⁹

The church as the people of God participates in a covenant which is constantly and currently renewed. This term is particularly evocative of the sense of identity and mission of the church. In constant counterpoint to this identity and mission, of course, is the remembered history in the Old Testament describing God's actions towards those

²⁷Ibid., p.204. ²⁸Ibid., p.183. ²⁹Miner, I, 610.

who forget the covenant, who ignore their responsibilities as the people of God.

The church is described at many places in the New Testament in terms of important institutions in Israel -- the kingdom, the temple with its priests, the new Jerusalem, etc. Again, much of this imagery is inherited from the Old Testament, but it is always understood afresh in the light of the current relationship between God and man. All these institutions exist for functional purposes, to serve God and fulfill his purposes in various ways. Thus here the church is understood to exist to perform certain functions (service, worship, etc.) under the authority of God.

Another set of images of the church sees it as the eschatological gathering of God's people into his household, to become his house and his family.³⁰ These images suggest a complex and total interrelationship between all the followers of Christ, as in a family. These images also emphasize the authority of God as the head of the household, and the service of the members who perform various necessary functions for the good of all, just as in a family responsibilities are distributed. Two important cognate images refer to the church as the sons of God

³⁰Ibid., I, p.612.

(emphasizing a central, common dependence on the Father) and as a brotherhood (emphasizing the unity and solidarity of the church as fellow heirs of God). Yet another cognate refers to the church as the bride of Christ (emphasizing the intimate nature of the relationship between Christ and the church, and also the need for fidelity and right behavior by the church). Again, much of this imagery is from the Old Testament, re-interpreted to reflect existing realities.

Another use of Old Testament images is in the reference to the church as the new exodus (Heb. 10.26, 12.29; I Pet. 1.17, 2.11). Such images reflect not only the special nature of the relationship between God and the church, but also emphasize the purposeful orientation of the church toward certain goals, and the need for struggle and testing as part of the process of achieving those goals -- overcoming difficulties in the environment.

Many agricultural images are applied to the church, all evocative of the church's dependence on God, of the qualitative necessity of producing fruit, and of the imminent process of judgment. Many of these images reflect the close and tender concern of Christ for the growth and production of the church, as a shepherd for his flock, a vintner for his vines, etc. Many of these images also reflect the unity and cooperation necessary in the church -- i.e. a field, the vine, the flock, etc.

In the Pauline epistles, the church is described as "one body in Christ" (Rom. 12.5) and as the "body of Christ" (Eph. 1.23). This rich image reflects many aspects of the relationship between Christ and the church. In the first place, it emphasizes the use of the historical life of Jesus as a paradigm for the life of the church; as Jesus in his physical body lived and taught and served, so the church as the body of Christ is to live and teach and serve; and as Jesus suffered and died and rose again, so the church is to suffer and die and rise again.

In the second place, this idea of the church as a body describes individual Christians as μέλη, which means members, parts, limbs. Bauer points out that in New Testament usage, there is no fixed boundary between parts of the body as taken literally and figuratively, which gives the metaphor a particularly vivid flavor in use.³¹ The idea of individuals in a church as members of a body emphasizes the unique functions of the individual, and recognizes his difference from other Christians, at the same time that it emphasizes unity. Just as each part of the body performs different functions so that the whole body may achieve goals, so also in the church. Furthermore, that which affects one part of the body affects every other

³¹Bauer, p.502.

part; and so in the church.

In Colossians and Ephesians, the image of the church as body is used to emphasize that Christ is the head, the source and center of authority and command.

One final class of images remains to be presented. The church is presented as the new humanity. In some ways, this is a reflection again of Old Testament themes. Just as the old man had his start and paradigm in the old Adam, as described in Genesis and developed by later commentators, so the Christian, the new man, has his beginning and paradigm in Jesus Christ, the new Adam. Each Christian must regard himself as a new creation, and must also regard every other Christian as a new creation. This unites them with Christ, the paradigm, and with each other. The image also emphasizes the uniqueness of the church, different from everything else in the world.

Now, what can be said in summary about the essential ideas and images of the church which are to be found in the New Testament? It is important not to say too much -- the New Testament writers used rich imagery and powerful imagination; each image is meant to emphasize one aspect of the church, and therefore the images are meant to be complementary, rather than equivalent. Furthermore, these images were developed out of a vital experience of the church, and in most cases are meant to express this vitality, rather than to provide a

logically consistent, discursive presentation of the theoretical basis of the church. It is not an accurate understanding of the form and function of the New Testament which tries to analyze the content into neat syllogisms. However, some generalizations can be made.

The church is understood to be defined by its relationship to God, a relationship of mutual responsibility. This unique relationship, which has its roots in the historical traditions of the Old Testament, yet has been uniquely established by the singular act of God in Jesus Christ. This relationship to a responsible, volitional God imposes a unity on the church, a unity which transcends all individual, local, and regional identities; the church is composed of all those who have responded to God's call in Jesus Christ, past, present, and future.

God's call in Jesus Christ, a call which is always understood to exist in the present, imposes a purpose upon the church. The church exists not only as a group of people who call themselves Christians, but as a body which corporately is trying to perform in the world according to God's will. Always the church exists because it is responding responsibly to God's will.

Chapter 4

SOME INSIGHTS FROM GENERAL SYSTEM THEORY

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, under the influence of the natural sciences, it became widely accepted that all reality was basically mechanistic -- the universe was considered to be a great machine.

The great machine had a determinate course. A knowledge of its present and therefore its future for all time was, in principle, man's to obtain, and perhaps in practice as well. The giant machine was not only causal and determinate; it was objective in the sense that no human act or intervention qualified its behavior.¹

This mechanistic approach has been enormously influential on organizational theorists; both directly and indirectly, the presuppositions of this classical scientific approach have been assumed to apply to organizations -- that is, organizations are determinate and analytical.

However, during the twentieth century, the mechanistic models have been called into serious question. Heisenberg, in his work on the uncertainty relations, introduced a note of ultimate contingency back into physics.

¹J. Robert Oppenheimer, Science and the Common Understanding (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), p.13.

The development of quantum physics was characterized by a broad tolerance of ambiguity, impossible for classical scientists.

Far from pressing for systematic reduction of the materials of life and society to the methods and mechanisms of traditional science, the most authoritative spokesmen for the new physics are instead to be found insisting upon the high degree of inappropriateness, not to say irrelevance, of these methods -- and hence upon the essential limitations of physical analysis when carried beyond the borders of its original and proper domain.²

One element in this movement away from deterministic, mechanical models has been General System Theory -- an attempt at a general theory of knowledge, an integration of knowledge across the lines of the traditional disciplines of human learning. This theory, which has been brilliantly developed in recent years by the biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy and others, can be characterized as a "science of organized wholes" or holistic. Proponents of this theory stress that it is necessary to study not only parts and processes in isolation, but also to solve the decisive problems found in the organization and order unifying them, resulting from the dynamic interaction of the parts, and making behavior of those parts different when studied in

²Floyd W. Matson, The Broken Image (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), p.134.

³Ludwig von Bertalanffy, General System Theory (New York: Braziller, 1968), p.37.

isolation or in the whole.⁴

General System Theory begins with the premise that any complex entity -- be it molecule, biological organism, social organization, or whatever -- can best be understood as a system. A system can be defined as a complex of elements interacting with one another in time, so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts and is constantly varying. It can readily be seen from this definition that a system is not analytic -- mechanistic models for the study of reality will not suffice to explain characteristic phenomena of a system. "The organism is quite different from a machine . . . its living reactions possess an element of fundamental incalculability and unpredictability."⁵

Floyd W. Matson has written clearly about the impact of system theory on biology. His comments apply with equal truth to the study of other aspects of reality, including organizational dynamics. Matson writes that this new holistic approach

has emboldened biologists to approach their own subject matter in synthetic as well as analytic terms -- to perceive Gestalten where once they could see only additive assemblages of parts. And with this radical

⁴Ibid., p.31.

⁵Pascual Jordan, Physics of the Twentieth Century (New York: Philosophical Library, 1944), p.152.

shift in perspective has come a sharpened awareness of the meaning of process in living systems: namely, the recognition of organisms as active and dynamic centers of directive striving rather than as inert or static mechanisms responding only passively to external stimuli. In a word, the concept of purpose was restored to biology, shorn of mysticism but not of teleology; living organisms could now be understood as acting upon the world (not merely being acted upon) in pursuit of goals set from within. Thus von Bertalanffy has distilled the essential principles of the organismic (system) theory in these succinct phrases: 'The conception of the system as a whole as opposed to the analytical and summative points of view; the dynamic conception as opposed to the static and machine-theoretical conceptions; the consideration of the organism as a primary activity as opposed to the conception of its primary reactivity.'⁶

Such a holistic approach has parallels in many fields. Certainly the development of Gestalt psychology, with its emphasis on patterns of organization in psychological events, is one such parallel.⁷ Gestalt psychologists emphasize that psychological events consist of parts in relationship; the whole is therefore greater than the sum of its parts. The work of Kurt Lewin has had particular impact on the study of the behavior of organizations. Lewin taught that the structure of the psychological field at any moment could influence the behavior of people in organizations and therefore that any understanding of the behavior of an organization needed to include an appreciation of the

⁶Matson, p.146.

⁷Ernest R. Hilgard, Introduction to Psychology (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1957), p.17

unique psychological field associated with every organization.

Yet another instructive parallel is to be found in the field of esthetics. Susanne K. Langer, in her book Problems of Art, has pointed to the importance of form in art -- "form in its most abstract sense means structure, articulation, a whole resulting from the relation of mutually dependent factors."⁸ This emphasis on relational structure, on gestalts, bears considerable resemblance to General System Theory. Given Langer's distinction that the artist perceives a complex whole and proceeds to distinctions of elements within it, where the scientist concatenates bits of knowledge in logical patterns until the complex whole is arrived at, it is not at all surprising that many valuable analogies in studying organizations are drawn from art as well as from science.⁹

This holistic approach, which has become important in several fields of inquiry, can be particularly useful in the study of human organizations. Many so-called systems approaches have been developed, some of which bear only the remotest resemblance to General System Theory. This dissertation, however, has been developed on the premise that it is General System Theory which is most

⁸Susanne K. Langer, Problems of Art (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), p.16.

⁹Ibid., appendix.

convergent with the Biblical images.

Organizations in general are open systems -- that is, they are open to and affected by the environment. The environment can be defined as that which lies outside the system, that which the system itself can do relatively little to change. Environment is generally fixed or given, insofar as the system is concerned.¹⁰ It is important to realize, however, that the boundary between system and environment is generally not precisely defined -- what seems to be environmental, and therefore uncontrollable, may in fact be found systemic if further knowledge of control processes is developed. In an open system, there is a continuous flux both in and out, a building up and breaking down of components. An open system is never in equilibrium. The system may be expanding (net influx), contracting (net outflux), or steady state (influx equivalent to outflux); but it is never static (no flux).

In an open system, the principle of equifinality applies; the same final state (or any given intermediate state) may be reached from different initial conditions and in different ways. An extension of the principle states that in an open system, given an initial state, it is not possible to predict with certainty the future states

¹⁰C. West Churchman, The Systems Approach (New York: Dell, 1968), pp.34ff.

that the system will have, although some probabilities may be assigned. This probability function is time-dependent; each successive stage in the development of an organization is less predictable than the preceding one.¹¹ Thus every open system is unique in each moment of time. Although certain general similarities between systems may be pointed out, and certain general characteristics of system behavior may be described, yet no two systems are ever the same in practice (in contrast to mechanistic models, where behind surface dissimilarities, all members of a class of events are basically similar). Any discussion of organizations must of necessity be abstract, and present insights rather than propositional analyses which would characterize every organization.

Open systems are also teleological -- the activities of open systems tend toward certain actualities or goals. Thus the characteristics of systemic behavior include not merely process but tendency, not settling but striving, not permanence but change.¹² It is at this point that General System Theory departs most significantly from the mechanistic viewpoint of classical science. The second law of thermodynamics holds that the entropy in a system always increases, i.e. that motive energy is always degraded.

¹¹Ibid., p.139. ¹²Matson, pp.147-152.

Open systems, however, continually exchange materials and energy with their environment, enabling them to produce increased variety of functioning and higher degrees of organization. The normal direction of an open system is toward ever-increasing levels of complexity and heterogeneity, with accompanying tension and effort -- rather than toward homogeneity, the reduction of tension, and the restoration of equilibrium at a lower level. The struggle is not for survival but for growth.¹³

It is characteristic of open systems that they affect their own progress towards goals by feedback. Feedback can be defined as the homeostatic maintenance of a characteristic state or the seeking of a goal, based upon circular causal chains and mechanisms monitoring back information on deviations from the state to be maintained or the goal to be reached. Open systems can modify their own behavior to achieve desired goals by comparing intermediate states to desired results, making logical extensions from intermediate states, and using the information to control the processes and activities of the system. Such feedback may also lead systems to modify their goals. The important point is that the initiative to modify behavior can be internal to the system -- it does not need to be externally imposed.

¹³Ibid., p.149.

An open system is unique at each moment in time. Thus timing is an important variable as a system modifies its behavior. An action may have one set of consequences at one moment, and a different set of consequences at a later time. Thus speed of transmission and evaluation affect the feedback process. If feedback is too slow, the system may not be able to affect events as they happen. If feedback is too fast, the system may over-react to minor stimuli. What is necessary is optimum timing.

Open states are hierarchical. To some extent every open system is a part of larger systems; and likewise, the components of any system which has more than two constituents will be related in smaller systems. In most systems, including organizations, the components are sufficiently complex that every recognizable constituent must be considered as a subsystem. Since each subsystem has its own goals (is teleological in its own right as a system), it is generally true that the constituent subsystems of a system compete for the resources available, i.e. the tendency towards goals is not unilateral, but rather an outgrowth of tensions between divergent or tangential tendencies in the subsystems.

A final characteristic of open systems is that growth rates tend to be exponential.¹⁴ This has some

¹⁴Bertalanffy, p.61.

rather startling effects on control functions in the system.¹⁵ One characteristic is positive feedback loops.

In a positive feedback loop a chain of cause-and-effect relationships closes on itself, so that increasing any one element in the loop will start a sequence of changes that will result in the originally changed element being increased even more.¹⁶

As a result, effects often tend to be out of proportion to causes. Open systems also have negative feedback loops.

In a negative feedback loop a change in one element is propagated around the circle until it comes back to change that element in a direction opposite to the initial change.¹⁷

Positive feedback loops tend to push the system out of control, negative feedback loops tend to regulate growth and to stabilize the system. Usually a given open system is characterized by both kinds of loops.

A further result of exponential growth rates is the overshoot mode. Because systems are in process, decisions are made (patterns established) based on information at one point in time; but there is a time period before implementation is completed. As a result, the system tends to go beyond desired states, then come back. This may be a one-time event at a given goal, or it may be an oscillatory pattern. However, if some factor in the process is fixed, this overshoot tendency may result in undesirable (or at

¹⁵Donella H. Meadows and others, The Limits to Growth (New York: Universe Books, 1972), chapter 1.

¹⁶Ibid., p.31. ¹⁷Ibid., p.35

least unforeseen) side effects. Furthermore, if control functions are limited in power, they may be unable to cope with the peak of the overshoot, leading to continued growth in that aspect of the system.

All in all, it can be said that it is not possible to assess the long-term future of any of the factors of a system without taking all the others into account. But even simple systems have such complicated interrelationships that it is almost impossible to understand how a change in one variable might ultimately affect each of the others. The complex, interrelated behavior of systems can only be understood intuitively.

Chapter 5

THE CHURCH AS SYSTEM

In the first chapter of this dissertation, it was established that The United Methodist Church, among other donominations, is undergoing an identity crisis, a time of confusion amongst lay and ordained members of the church as to its purpose and function, which needs to be resolved in the development of a coherent image or doctrine of the church which is widely accepted. In the second chapter, the problem of sources was considered. Emphasis was placed on the importance to an acceptable identity of being contiuous with the constitutive traditions of The United Methodist Church, and of being consonant with the Scriptures. In the third chapter, Biblical material concerning the church was examined. In the fourth chapter, some basic information from General System Theory and other current disciplines was presented which may be useful in developing a coherent doctrine of the church. In this chapter, similarities between the Biblical material and the material from General System Theory will be pointed out, and some conclusions will be drawn about the nature, purpose, shape, and functions of the church. Because the

author is particularly interested in the parish as a fundamental localization of the church, special stress will be put on parish perspectives.

The church may be described as a cooperative system. To use Chester Barnard's memorable definition,

A cooperative system is a complex of physical, biological, personal, and social components which are in a specific systematic relationship by reason of the cooperation of two or more persons for at least one end.¹

A cooperative system is characterized by its components -- persons -- and their relationships; by its goals; and by the various working arrangements which the system develops to meet those goals.

In chapter 3, it was shown that the most common term for the church in the New Testament, *ἐκκλησία*, refers primarily to a group of people gathered to accomplish a particular purpose or purposes (goals) -- certainly a similar concept to that of a cooperative system. Furthermore, the *ἐκκλησία* has in the New Testament a unique, corporate meaning -- similar to the fundamental system concept that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and cannot be understood solely by reference to its parts in isolation.

Albert C. Outler has pointed to the traditional

¹Chester I. Barnard, The Functions of the Executive (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), p.65.

Methodist conception of Methodism as an evangelical community of persons defined by a unique mission. "Wesley defined the church as act, as mission."² It was pointed out in Chapter 1 that ministry (i.e. mission) is a central concept in the United Methodist understanding of the church; ministry is in the end a goal-oriented concept. All in all, it may be said that characteristic Methodist doctrines of the church bear many affinities to the concept of a cooperative system.

A cooperative system is an open system, and participates in the characteristics of open systems mentioned in Chapter 4 -- it is open to the environment; its processes are equifinal, teleological, hierarchical, time dependent, and exponential; and goal achievement is affected by feedback and overshoot. These characteristics all have their specific parallels in Biblical conceptions and in United Methodist traditions. Some examples may suffice to illustrate the point.

The first characteristic of an open system is that it is open to the environment -- i.e. its processes are modified by factors which are beyond its control. There are two facets to a system conception of the church which

²Albert C. Outler, "Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church", in Dow Kirkpatrick (ed.), The Doctrine of the Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), p.19.

may be examined in this respect. First, the activities and styles of the church are continually open to modification by God's activities in the church and in the world. God as the transcendent power at work in all things can be understood as the environment. While God's impact on the church culminated in the historical Christ-event, still God is actively at work in the world today, and the channels for His effect upon the church are in no way limited.

One of the most familiar accents in traditional United Methodist teaching has been on the primacy of grace. By grace we mean God's loving action in human existence through the ever-present agency of the Holy Spirit. Grace, so understood, is the spiritual climate and environment surrounding all human life at all times and in all places.³

Secondly, since the church exists to cooperate with God's purposes in and for the world, the specific forms of the church's activity must be functionally derived from the situations which arise independently in the world. This conception is closely tied to the idea of equifinality. Any particular goal may be achieved in different ways; the choice between different ways of moving toward a goal is made not on the basis of absolute preference, but on the basis of maximizing effect, comparative efficiency, etc.

³The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 1972 (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1973), p.73.

There is no "one best way". The Biblical emphasis on multiple ways of doing things is certainly similar to this. Paul's statement in I Corinthians 9.22, "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some", is one similar statement. The Methodist tradition of adaptation, of adopting different styles in different situations also is similar. Furthermore, the Methodist tradition of accepting any problem which may arise in the world as a potential opportunity for spreading the Gospel puts strong emphasis on openness.

Another characteristic of open systems is that they are teleological -- they tend toward goals. The above discussion of ministry ought to establish the similarity between this system characteristic and Biblical and traditional Methodist characteristics. A further observation can be made, that the numerous eschatological references in the New Testament, whether interpreted literally or symbolically, emphasize the teleological character of the relationship between God and the church.

Open systems use feedback to monitor and modify the progress they make towards goals. In the New Testament, there are several similarities to feedback processes. In particular, the emphasis on evaluating real behavior and modifying it to conform to the will of God is basically a feedback process. For example, when in Matthew 7.21 Jesus is quoted, "Not everyone who calls me "Lord, Lord" shall

enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven", the emphasis is towards pragmatic evaluation of actions and corrective action as necessary. Likewise the traditional Methodist emphasis on gradual and responsible progress towards holiness presupposes some sort of feedback procedure. The old Methodist use of classes to help individuals modify their behavior is one such feedback emphasis.

The importance of timing in systems is consonant with the Biblical emphasis on timing. By way of example, a standard concordance lists numerous references in the New Testament to "the proper time", "a favorable time", and so forth.⁴ Likewise, when Paul in I Corinthians 3 uses several different metaphors to describe the necessity for proper sequences in church activities, he is emphasizing timing. The traditional Methodist emphasis on the discipline of grace which guides and matures the Christian life is also a matter of timing.

Open systems are hierarchical. In chapter 3, it was pointed out that the New testament concept of ἐκκλησία is hierarchical. The emphasis in the constituent traditions of United Methodism on connectionalism and hierarchical

⁴The Zondervan Expanded Concordance (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968), pp.1523ff.

structures shows further parallels.

One further characteristic of open systems is that their growth and response patterns tend to be exponential, leading to overshoot modes. It is rather hard to find direct parallels to this characteristic in the New Testament, but the numerous references to the explosive impact of the Gospel in new situations (cf. Pentecost in Acts.2ff) is consistent with exponential behavior. Likewise, the many references in the Epistles to the problem of excesses in Christian behavior, and the need for proper proportion, are consistent with overshoot modes. Traditional Methodist emphases on the explosive potential of the Gospel and on the dangers of excesses also provide parallels.

Given the above similarities between system images and Biblical and traditional Methodist doctrines, in what way can system concepts extend and clarify contemporary understandings of the church?

A cooperative system is characterized by its components -- people -- and their relationships; by its goals; and by the various working arrangements which the system develops to meet those goals. Each of these characteristic areas is systematic in its own right; these areas can be denoted, respectively, "organization systems", "value systems", and "program systems". Organization systems consist of the people who make up the church and

their complex relationships. Value systems consist of the goals of the organization (both overt and covert), the accepted norms of behavior, and the complex relationships between these elements. And program systems consist of the coordinated body of methods and plans of procedure which the church develops to carry out its mission. These various kinds of systems are so intertwined in practice as to be virtually indistinguishable. However, the distinction between them is a valuable heuristic device -- it makes it possible to examine the complex reality of the church a little more clearly. One further note -- every church system is unique. The kinds of relationships which characterize one parish will not be so in another.

The church is made up of people. These people are organized in a great many complex ways. Each individual participates in many organizations, and his roles in various organizations conflict.

Lay people say that because the church functions in a diversified society of many beneficial causes that compete for everyone's time, the church must meet the needs of members for growth and service if it is to keep them interested and involved. As for the main reasons why interest sags, they cited lack of time and getting absorbed in nonchurch organizations, which are two sides of the same coin.⁵

Each parish has its own unique set of members, with unique

⁵Douglas W. Johnson and George W. Cornell, Punctured Preconceptions (New York: Friendship Press, 1972), p.33.

relationships and conflicts. However, some generalizations can be made.

The church as open system is hierarchical. One step below the church universal are the major branches of the church -- Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox. Below these are denominations, then other levels of systems such as conferences, districts, sub-districts, cluster groups, etc. Then comes the local parish or congregation, which is in itself hierarchical. The parish may also be related systematically to other kinds of groups -- Council of Churches, COCU, etc. All these organization systems overlap and interrelate.

As an organization in society, the church is also hierarchically related to a great many political and social systems. It overlaps and interacts with every organization in which a member of the church is a member, and a great many more besides. The church is systematically related to nations, to the alliances in which nations participate, and to the various political sub-divisions of nations (states, counties, cities, etc.). It is systematically related to all the organizations in which its members work, to many philanthropic and charitable organizations, and so forth.

Historically, the Methodist movement has recognized its varied and complex relationships to other groups and institutions in the world, and has deliberately used these relationships to effect its mission. F. Gerald Ensley has

written astutely that

American Methodism represents a colossal experiment in secular Christianity . . . a religion that takes the world for its medium and measures its success by the degree that it changes the individuals who comprise the world.⁶

The United Methodist Church participates in a tradition that not only recognizes its systematic relationships to the rest of the world, but rejoices in those opportunities that arise thereby, and uses those relationships to carry out its mission and maximize its impact on the world.

It is important to notice that the roles of a system, such as a parish, in its overlap with other systems, often conflict. Role choices need to be made, but the conflict is never resolved, and the tension between roles arises continuously.

The parish is itself hierarchical in that the members are organized into smaller systems in the pursuit of particular goals. Some of these smaller systems are formal elements in the structure of the parish -- boards, councils, commissions, Sunday School classes, women's groups, etc. Other systems are informal, task-oriented groups, such as men who work together on property maintenance, study groups which meet informally to work on specific problems, prayer

⁶F. Gerald Ensley, "American Methodism: An Experiment in Secular Christianity", in Emory S. Bucke (ed.), The History of American Methodism (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), III, p.616.

groups which meet to enrich the member's devotional lives and to request God's help in specific situations, and so forth. Still other systems within the parish are informal social groups of members -- friends, business acquaintances, co-members of community groups, and so forth. Such groups usually come together for purposes not directly related to the purposes of the church, but they affect the parish nonetheless. Finally, a basic component system in the church is the family. In parish situations, family systems may be limited to single household units, but in other situations large extended family systems may strongly affect the parish.

Again it is important to note that individuals will ordinarily participate in several of these overlapping systems, and their roles in these sub-systems will conflict. Thus the individual's role in the parish will be a synthesis of conflicting roles in these systems.

To say that the church is an open system is to say that the system can be affected by factors which it in return cannot affect. Such factors come into the church through the network of overlapping systems in which it participates. But it is this same network which enables the church to affect persons far beyond its formal organizational boundaries. Recognition of the church as a system phenomenon is a recognition of function and responsibility far beyond the recognized boundaries of the

organization, which is certainly compatible with the New Testament idea of the church. Furthermore, recognition of the complex interrelationships of all Christians supports the sense of unity in the church which is so strong in the New Testament.

It is important to notice that the strength of different kinds of component systems will vary greatly from parish to parish. In one setting, power may be exercised mainly through formal organizations -- boards, commissions, etc. In another setting, informal power centers may dominate. It is vital that those who have directive functions in the parish assess the unique structure of power in the local parish accurately and pragmatically, in order to function most effectively. This assessment is by no means an exact process -- in is basically an exercise in sensitive awareness.

The Methodist tradition has placed a strong emphasis on such pragmatic approaches to getting things accomplished. Bishop Ensley has pointed to this pragmatism as a major factor in Methodism's success in America: "Oriented to the world, it accommodated itself to situations that baffled churches which looked to the Bible or tradition exclusively for guidance."⁷ The pragmatic, open approach

⁷Ibid., III, p.619.

of system analysis and management is quite consonant with the traditional styles and emphases which United Methodism has inherited.

One final comment on organization systems is in order. The Christian belief that God in Jesus Christ is alive and well in the midst of His people as the Holy Spirit can be expressed in the notion that He is a living component of the church system, complexly related to every individual and group in that system. The Methodist tradition, which emphasizes this very point, can be illustrated by John Wesley's statement:

I believe the infinite and eternal Spirit of God, equal with the Father and the Son, to be not only perfectly holy in himself, but the immediate cause of all holiness in us: enlightening our understandings, rectifying our wills and affections, renewing our natures, uniting our persons to Christ, assuring us of the adoption of sons, leading us in our actions, purifying and sanctifying our souls and bodies to a full and eternal enjoyment of God.⁸

The Biblical image of the church as the Body of Christ, which also emphasizes the immediacy of God's participation in the church, is yet another parallel to the previous statement that God is a living component of the church system.

Another vital aspect to the assessment of church

⁸John Wesley, in Albert C. Outler (ed.), John Wesley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p.495.

systems is the analysis of goals, or value systems.

The church organization is unique among other organizations in that the *raison d'être* of the church is the value system presented in the Gospel through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The operative value system in the church is derived from and informed by the parish's understanding of the Gospel in large measure, although this is certainly not the only effective source of values.

The many organization systems in which the church participates, as described above, each have their own developed value systems. Each of these value systems has some effect on the church value system. Furthermore, each member of the church has many personal needs and values. Many of these needs and values reflect the individual's participation in a wide range of social, organization systems, both internal and external to the church. These personal needs and desires, the values of different systems in which the church participates, and the understood values of the Gospel, interact to produce the operative church value system.

This value system is constantly in tension, constantly in flux. The value systems of groups within the church will often diverge, to a greater or lesser extent, from the integrated church value system. Furthermore, various goals to which the church is committed equally strongly will conflict; the value system is by

no means rationally coherent. The value system in the church is not static. As needs, desires, and understandings change, as members grow in their hearing and understanding of God's will, the value system which reflects these strong value forces changes.

Edgar H. Schein makes an interesting distinction between the various components of a value system:

- (1) the basic operational goals of the organization
- (2) the preferred means by which these goals should be accomplished
- (3) the basic responsibilities of the member in the personal role which he and the organization jointly develop
- (4) the behavior patterns which are required for effective performance in the role
- (5) a set of rules or principles which pertain to the maintenance of the identity and integrity of the organization.⁹

In a church value system, these components have some unique characteristics. The operational goals of the church -- those achievements toward which effort is directed -- tend to be concerned with life qualities which are not easily defined and not readily quantifiable. Thus even when specific proximate goals are established, it is difficult to assess success or failure relative to final goals. This uncertainty is more pronounced in the church than in most other organizations.

⁹Edgar H. Schein, "Organizational Socialization and the Profession of Management", Industrial Management Review, IX:2 (Winter 1968), p.3.

The preferred means for accomplishing church goals are determined by several factors. Some means are historically Christian, historically Protestant, historically denominational, and so forth. Methodism has a tradition of using widely different means in different situations, as was pointed out above. However, at the practical level, some tactics have been used frequently enough in United Methodism that many people have become accustomed to them, since they have been often effective. For one example, Methodists have been accustomed to working together connectionally on projects of supra-local importance, and there has developed a tendency to use national boards and other such organized groups to coordinate the work of many parishes on one problem. Other methods may be considered appropriate because they exemplify behavioral ideas. F. Gerald Ensley has pointed out that this tendency has caused Methodism some problems at times.

Some of the reasons for Methodism's social backwardness are plain. For one thing, like their Protestant brethren generally, Methodists were handicapped by their individualistic premises. They conceived of sin largely in terms of personal transgressions -- profanity, drinking, card-playing, dancing, worldliness in general. A Puritan concern for the moral conversion of individuals took precedence over social programs.¹⁰

This tendency to emphasize behavioral ideals in choosing

¹⁰Ensley, III, p.624.

preferred means is common to the Methodist tradition. It has both good and bad points, but it is Methodist. Still other methods may be understood as a part of local or regional church identity -- "This is the way we do things", etc. These preferred means are closely tied up with the apprehension of goals. The existential understanding of goals is very much concerned with the expected means of accomplishing those goals.

The basic responsibilities of the members in their various roles in the church are also unique. Some responsibilities will be assigned to members by the organization. Other responsibilities will be voluntarily assumed by members. And other assignments are made on the basis of tacitly understood traditions, the reasons for which are not remembered by any of the principals involved. This is as true for the ordained minister's role as it is for all other roles in the parish -- the role is continually evolving at the interfaces between the individual, the organization, and all the groups in the organization in which the individual participates. The traditional Methodist emphasis on church discipline has stressed the formal assignment of responsibilities. The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 1972 has 653 pages, the majority of which are devoted to assigning responsibilities and defining roles. Even so, a great many of the responsibilities in the church are necessarily worked out informally.

The behavior patterns which are required for effective performance in a church role will vary with the role. A person who accepts or is assigned a responsibility will usually be expected to carry out that responsibility conscientiously, consistently, promptly, and so forth.

The set of rules or principles which pertain to the maintenance of the identity and integrity of the church will often be implicit rather than explicit. Another phrase which is often used in this respect is the "viability" of the church. Parish members are concerned that the parish continue to function effectively in a community context. Decisions must therefore be made with an eye to long-term consequences, not just immediate goals.

Schein makes a further distinction between pivotal values and relevant values.¹¹ Pivotal values are central to the value system, and adherence to them is a necessary prerequisite to continued participation in the organization. Relevant values, on the other hand, are values which it is not necessary to accept as the price of membership, but which are considered desirable and good to accept. The Methodist tradition has made a very similar distinction. John Wesley wrote, "As to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think."¹²

¹¹Schein, p.9. ¹²Book of Discipline, p.39.

This statement seems to imply that, while there are values which are pivotal (the root), not too many values ought to be considered pivotal. In practice, it seems at times that United Methodists consider all values relevant, none pivotal. This may be another symptom of the identity crisis facing The United Methodist Church. Pivotal values are a central part of organizational identity; "What we uniquely are" is in large part "What we uniquely believe". Confusion over identity is reflected in confusion over which values are pivotal and which relevant. Thus theological reflection must play an important role in the development of a coherent sense of identity for The United Methodist Church. The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 1972 included a lengthy statement on "Our Theological Task", which reflects a current surge of interest in delineating United Methodist beliefs, and therefore in developing a new sense of identity.¹³

Even when the denomination as a whole comes to some consensus on pivotal beliefs, there will still be significant local and regional variations and additions. In some groups, a value may be pivotal; in other groups it is only relevant; and in some other groups it may be quite peripheral. The point is that not all values are

¹³Ibid., pp.68-82.

equally important for the organization or for any component of it.

It was pointed out in chapter 4 that open systems are teleological. They have the possibility of continual growth through the continual input of energy from external sources. The church as value system receives energy both from God and from the social environment in which it is placed. Growth comes out of conflict, out of the dynamic interaction of existing values with the word of God and with other values which members bring.

In order for the complex church organization to put into action its complex values, it must develop and coordinate a body of methods and plans of procedure to accomplish its goals. Furthermore, since resources are inevitably more limited than the potential uses of resources, some allocation of resources to competing activities must be made on the basis of a judgment of comparative value. Since program systems development and implementation is not a fixed procedure, but a tentative, fluid, groping, questing endeavor, this process must be described not only in terms of the characteristics of effective program systems, but also in terms of the dynamics of decision making which affect the process.

Since the church is a system, a complex whole, church programs ought to be the result of a comprehensive integration of the values and judgments of the whole

organization. In the church, program systems must also be centrally informed by the Gospel. There are a number of barriers to these goals. Since the church is a complex organization, decisions are not equally affected by every member of the organization. Some people may have a great deal of power to influence organizational decisions, while other members may be quite peripheral to the process. Thus some people's values will shape church programs more strongly than will other people's values, and some people will identify with the goals and methods of the program system more fully than others.

Even though it is normal for different persons in the organization to have differing impacts upon program systems, and to agree to differing extents with those program systems, there is a delicate balance that must be maintained. Most church members expect to support the church organization to which they belong even when they disagree with many of the programs and activities that organization carries out.¹⁴ However, when disagreements become too profound, when members feel that their pivotal values are not being reflected in the program systems, that they are not allowed to contribute to the integrating decision process, then their sense of identity with the

¹⁴ Douglas W. Johnson and George W. Cornell, Punctured Preconceptions (New York: Friendship Press, 1972), pp.13-23.

organization becomes diffused, leading to conflict and an outflow of energy from the organization to other organizations. The clericalization of the church has caused such conflict. In United Methodism, the growth of relatively autonomous denominational structures which receive financial support from the whole church is another source of conflict. In recent years, for example, many United Methodists have felt that the priorities and emphases of the World Division of the Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church have not represented either the traditions of United Methodism or the values of its current members. As a result, many United Methodist members and groups (including parishes) have diverted resources to outside groups for mission purposes, and others have begun sending United Methodist missionaries apart from the normal denominational channels. Significant groups such as the Evangelical Missions Council have arisen to oppose current United Methodist mission policies. All in all, it may be said that The United Methodist Church needs badly to develop more integrative decision-making processes in order to maximize personal identification with the church and to maximize goal achievement.

The people who operate in decision-making processes also have differing and imperfect apprehensions of the Gospel. The sense of judgment -- the imperative to constantly reassess goals and values in the light of the Gospel --

is a necessary part of program development and implementation. Men are subject to sin. This means that goals, procedures, and activities which are developed by men with the best of intentions may turn out to be dysfunctional, or more bluntly, wrong. Program systems ought therefore never to be regarded as fixed, but must be constantly questioned, constantly re-evaluated.

Another problem is that persons who wield power in one phase of the decision-making process may not wield it in other phases. Thus different program goals and activities may be contradictory or conflicting. This is particularly true when resources are allocated by people who are not sensitive to the aims of the program system. If key elements of the system are under-funded, the whole system may suffer as a result. This dynamic in decision-making can provide further perspective on key issues, and may function as a necessary check and balance to ensure that program activities are reasonable. But it can also prevent a program system from developing innovative approaches to necessary activities. Conflict can be either a help or a hindrance to program development, depending on how the conflict is structured and used.

Conflict may manifest itself in different forms. As was mentioned above, not all values are relevant for an organization. Some values that are pivotally important to some groups in the parish may be relevant but not vital

to other groups, and may be peripheral to yet other groups. There are two extreme responses to value conflict in program development. Neither extreme is consistent with the historic Methodist tradition discussed earlier, but many United Methodist parishes seem to move towards one or the other extreme anyhow. At one extreme, some parishes try to limit the number of pivotal values which affect program; this can result in the parish ignoring vital areas of concern and losing identity and distinctive character. On the other extreme, some parishes strongly stress a large number of pivotal values, with the result that the parish becomes distinctive but ingrown; only those people who can commit themselves to this distinctive style remain in the organization. Such an approach, which stresses a fixed value structure, runs the strong risk of heresy, since it is very difficult in this situation to be open to the further judgment of the Gospel. Somehow, an effective program system must continually reflect the tension between the values of all organization members and the Gospel, at the same time developing a distinctive style and remaining open to judgment.

The discussion above favors a flexible and pragmatic approach to program systems development and implementation, which is consistent with the traditional Methodist emphasis on adaptation. This can be difficult to achieve in practice. Some degree of fixation is necessary. The program is a

system -- every activity has some effect on every other activity -- and therefore some fixed representation of the relationship of activities to one another, and of the available resources allocated to each, is necessary for both short and long range planning. However, this common representation must not become too inviolable. It is only a means to program goals and effective planning, not the end in itself.

Every parish has certain preferred means, which tend to predominate in the program system. Some preferred means are quite variable in detail, but leave little room for innovation in content: "This is what the Bible says -- how can we best indoctrinate our people in this view?", and so forth. Other preferred means stress specific forms of activities -- Sunday School, Vacation Church School, Women's Societies, etc. with little room for variation. Some of these preferred means are imposed by denominational polity; others may be the outgrowth of parish tradition, etc. Since such preferred means are usually backed up by experience with component relationships and methods, their use can be an enabling factor. However, if these activities become ends in themselves, the program system may lose pertinence in the lives of the people.

Ultimate Christian goals tend to be life qualities rather than specific behavioral objectives per se. One task in program development is to translate these vague

life qualities into specific behavioral goals and activities which can be quantified, assessed, compared, and so forth. This is a dangerous business. Specific activities in practice may do precisely the opposite of what they were intended to do. Another problem is that relatively peripheral proximate activities may be the focus of intense conscious interest and heated debate, while vital central issues remain unarticulated. People are only partially aware of the strong motivating factors in their lives.

It is thus important that values and goals be continually made as explicit as possible. The whole church needs to be constantly involved in the articulation and modification of values. Effective program development depends on the apprehension of subtle nuances and differences in values. One problem is that, when people formally consider values in self-conscious discussion, they modify values in expression. Thus values formally expressed are more or less distortions of basic operative values. Intuition and perception with sensitivity are indispensable to pragmatic assessment of operative values, and thus to appropriate program development.

Chapter 6

IN SUMMARY

Every organization, as well as every person, needs to have a coherent identity, a clear conception of role, function, and purpose which is generally agreed upon by the members of the organization. This identity is formed through the integration of material from many sources; the formative process can be consciously affected and enhanced by the organization. The sense of identity of an organization needs to be psychologically continuous -- that is, the members need to understand clearly their connections to the beliefs, habits, etc. which characterized those who preceded them in the organization.

When this clear conception of role, purpose, and function becomes confused -- when a crisis of identity occurs -- the organization is no longer able to act as effectively as before. A new sense of identity must be developed. Such a crisis of identity now faces The United Methodist Church. This crisis has been growing for some time now. It has become more and more vital that The United Methodist Church develop again an integrated and generally accepted understanding of its purpose and function, in order

to serve as a functional and effective instrument of the Gospel in the world today.

One aspect of this crisis is the loss of a sense of historical continuity. The emphases and practices which have characterized Methodism in the past are no longer recognizable to many United Methodists. The unique content of the description "Methodist" is no longer clearly understood.

Another aspect to the identity crisis is the gradual clericalization of the church. Lay people have removed themselves (with help) from meaningful participation in the church. It is now necessary to develop new doctrines and practices to give the laity an effective voice. Clergy as well have been affected by the crisis of identity. In recent years, certain concepts of the church and its functions seem to be gaining wide acceptance. This dissertation presents material which may be pertinent to the process of self-consciously forming a new sense of identity for The United Methodist Church.

What sources are appropriate to such a process? Certainly the Scriptures are necessary and basic for a Christian organization. The traditions which have led to United Methodism also provide a vital source. Other sources such as philosophy, science, and so forth can also be useful so long as they do not conflict with Scripture.

In the New Testament, the church is understood to be defined by its relationship to God, a relationship of mutual responsibility. This unique relationship, which has its roots in the historical traditions of the Old Testament, yet has been uniquely established by the singular act of God in Jesus Christ. This relationship to a responsible, volitional God imposes a unity on the church, a unity which transcends all individual, local, and regional identities; the church is composed of all those who have responded to God's call in Jesus Christ, past, present, and future.

God's call in Jesus Christ, a call which is always understood to exist in the present, imposes a purpose upon the church. The church exists not only as a group of people who call themselves Christians, but as a body which corporately is trying to perform in the world according to God's will. Always the church exists because it is responding responsibly to God's will.

Until recently, most scientists and organization theorists assumed that reality and all of its parts could be modeled by an analytic machine. This assumption has been changing in recent years towards more holistic models. One such model is provided by General System Theory, which begins with the insight that the complex whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Organizations, seen from this perspective, must be studied not only bit by bit, but also in interaction. Organizations are actually open systems.

They are affected by their environment. They are equifinal, teleological, hierarchical. They use feedback to maximize progress towards goals, and their growth behavior is exponential.

There are considerable similarities between the system view of organizations, the Biblical images of the church, and traditional Methodist understandings of their own selves. These system characteristics can help extend and expand current understandings of the church. In the terminology of organization theory, the church is a cooperative system. System concepts are particularly useful in analyzing the organizational relationships of the church, the complex values of the church, and the program development efforts of the church. These analyses do not provide a complete new identity for the church, but they do bring new and powerful tools to bear on the problems confronting The United Methodist Church, and thereby may contribute to the complex process which eventually can culminate in a revitalized church serving effectively in the world.

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